Review
Reviewed Work: André de Muralt, *La conscience transcendantale dans le criticisme kantien. Essai sur l'unité d'aperception* (Aubier).
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André de Muralt, Transcendental Consciousness in Kantian Criticism: An Essay on the Unity of Apperception (Aubier)

This vigorous study yields its secret only after cautious preliminary work.

No one is unaware that the Kantian critique refers every formation of an object to constitutive universal thought. Kant knows that we are all spontaneously realists. And on a certain level he justifies this conviction of the natural attitude. The empirical subject is indeed determined by the empirical object. But how could this subject be conscious of being a determinate part of the universe if it did not secretly extend its "tentacular power" to everything by which it asserts itself? How could there be a nature for one who was merely a piece or an appendage of it — who did not posit himself as prior to all receptivity, and could not carve himself out against a background of absolute universality? All information must be preceded by a formation of exigencies without which there is neither whole, nor part, nor determination, nor even meaning.

We can see that the "subjectivist" interpretation of Kant goes astray in collapsing the transcendental subject and the empirical subject onto the level of the latter, and in supposing that the individual man constitutes objects in arbitrary isolation. Empirical consciousness is itself constituted, and it can know by analysis that it would not be conscious at all were it not an inner mode of the single thinking activity that determines itself through it.

> *"The universal subject is the form of individual selves, just as pure time is the form of our notion of time. In short, individual (empirical) selves would be possible because there is a universal Self which grounds them in some sense, and which is transcendental. Here we come within a hair's breadth of Platonism, the universal Self being assimilable to an Idea" (p. 190, n. 4).*

The design of the work appears in these lines. At the same time its boldness becomes apparent, tending to show that the weight of the critique carries Kant beyond critique itself, toward a metaphysics of the pure Self that will flower in Fichte, but that is already

foreshadowed in Spinoza. Perhaps one should even see in it the outlines of a philosophy of unity of the Neoplatonic type, with its distinction between universal spirit and particular spirits.

The great obstacle to such an undertaking, one can guess, is the Kantian thesis of the Thing in itself. This seems to be a survival of realist metaphysics. Noetic activity, in Kant, rests on two existential foundations, of which it is, so to speak, the relation. The Self in itself sustains the form of knowledge; the Thing in itself supplies its matter.

But it must not be forgotten that this latter noumenon remains, as to its reality, problematic. Neither its necessity nor its possibility can be demonstrated. [1] The only noumenon that is attained immediately as an existence — albeit an indeterminate one — is the pure Subject. It is well known that practical Reason discovers that intelligible causality is that of our own legislating freedoms. It is then tempting to posit, with Fichte, that the Self in itself is the whole of the Thing in itself. Kant no doubt disowned his disciple, but one may wonder which of the two is more faithful to the logic of Kantianism.

That logic does not lead to a definitive dualism. Knowledge appears as a rigorous reciprocity. [2] The two poles of representation — form and matter, subject and object, reflection and intention — are strictly correlative and coeval. The object is subjective consciousness itself. That is why, at the empirical level, there are as many moments of consciousness as there are objective elements. But since there can be no time without a totalization of successive instants, there is an object only through a linking of impressions. Every unity of the manifold refers back to a synthetic act, one all the more rigorous the more intrinsic that unity is. And one necessarily arrives at a point where there can no longer be any difference between subject and object, nor among subjects, all essence being something constituted. All consciousness is consciousness of otherness — but, after analysis, it is transcendental consciousness of the unthinkable coincidence that grounds all thought.

Thus, critical reflection leads us from the empirical manifold to formal multiplicity, from this to the relation of consciousness, and from the latter to the unity of apperception. It must then be acknowledged that consciousness outstrips itself in its generative identity, mistress of its own forms. This one is critically unjustifiable, except in the sense that every critique presupposes it. Inexpressible by any thought whatsoever, it is especially so within Kant's essentialist problematic.

One can see the circuit traced by this study: first seek the formation of the object within the subject, then the consciousness of the subject within the object, and finally understand that these two terms are a diffraction — always accomplished, always surpassed. As soon as the intelligible world is regarded as an operation, it no longer separates the Self from the one.

One may perhaps grant the author that there is more Platonism in Kant than Kant himself thought.

Jean Trouillard

Translator's Notes

[1] The source text reads: "On n'en peut démontrer la nécessité possibilité," which appears to be missing a word or two in the scanned original (most likely "ni la nécessité ni la possibilité," "neither the necessity nor the possibility"). Translated accordingly.

[2] The source text reads: "La connaissance apparaît rigoureuse réciprocité," likely eliding "comme une" ("appears as a rigorous reciprocity"). Translated with the implied sense.